

## The Capture of Cateswell.

By ARTHUR DENSMORE.

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IT HAPPENED to be driving past the railroad station when the train pulled in, and from the look of him I guessed who he was. I don't go to the Methodist church myself, but I'd heard them talking about it.

"You're the new minister, ain't you?" says I. "Well, it's a right smart piece over to Middletown. Get in and ride."

"Thank you," says he, smiling quite cordial. "Mr. Boggs was to meet me, but he doesn't seem to be here."

"Boggs got summoned to appear before the grand jury today to tell what he knows about Jim Sissy's selling liquor on the sly," says I, "and, coming on him quite unexpected and he and Jim always being good friends, it haired him up so's he must have forgot about you."

"Then it's surely fortunate you happened along," says he, helping Gates, the station man, put his trunk into the back of the wagon.

He was a nice, pleasant spoken little chap that didn't give himself airs or talk about things common folks couldn't understand, and I cottoned to him right off. But all at once a horrible suspicion struck me.

"Say!" says I, pulling up the horse short. "I see you come alone. Are you married?"

"No," says he, reddening some in the face and acting kind of confused, "not yet."

"Poor little cuss!" says I as sympathetic as I knew how. "Poor little cuss! You've got a mighty tough row to hoe, and no mistake."

He laughed out loud when I said that.

"Now, why, I wonder?" says he.

"It's easy enough to see, I should think," says I. "There's fifty-four eligible females in your congregation. You ain't got all the privileges Solomon had, and you can't marry but one. When you do that the other fifty-three'll get sore, and they'll go whispering around that your preaching



"SUCH PROPENSITY AS YOURS IS INEXCUSABLE."

ain't orthodox. That'll stir up a row, and you'll have to look for an another job."

"I'm afraid you're a bit of a cynic," says he.

I didn't think I'd said anything that gave him cause to call me a name like that, and I told him so.

"Tain't a term of reproach," says he. "It's merely a way of saying that you ain't sentimental."

"Well, I hope not," says I.

We was just going by the Holmes place, and I caught a glimpse of Sophie Holmes—that's forty-two if she's a day, and she can't fool me on her age because I went to school with her—peeking out from behind a window curtain at us. A little ways farther on, just as we was getting into the village, we passed the Buxton twins, sauntering along with their arms twined real loving around each other's waists. They're pretty stuck up, and generally they don't notice me on the street, but when they got a sight of the minister they smiled most affable and bowed and said, "How do you do, Mr. Souther?" like I was their old bachelor uncle just come back to town after spending forty prosperous years or so in the golden west.

"You see how it is," says I, winking at the minister. "First time they've spoken to me in six months."

"I fancy you tend toward playful exaggeration," says he as I set him down at the door of the hotel.

"What?" says I, suspecting another insult.

"I mean," says he, "that you got more fun out of life than most of 'em do."

"Well," says I, "I ain't saying but that may be so, but before you've been here long you'll find that I've sized the situation pretty accurate. And if you feel like you wanted advice any time just sling out. There ain't nobody hereabouts that can tip you off any straighter than I can."

"Thank you," says he, waving his hand as he went up to the hotel. "Good-by, and I'm obliged to you for driving me over."

"Don't mention it," says I.

When I'd drove a little ways up the

street and Cateswell had got inside the hotel I saw Susie Ramsdell come out of Jim Jarvis' store right opposite. She'd been in there, pretending to buy something, just to get a chance to rubber at the minister.

Well, I come to know Cateswell pretty intimate after a little. I guess folks had told him I was a chap that could keep things under my hat, and so he made quite free in telling me things. He had to quit living at the hotel after a week or two. Bill Twichell, that runs it, swore so the parson couldn't stand it. Bill's got a voice that you can hear over in the next township when he's speaking as usual, and when he swears he raises it a little. So it didn't do Cateswell any good to shut himself up in his room. He could hear it up there just the same. He gave Bill a talking to about it. Bill got mad. He doesn't know half the time when he swears. It's as natural to him as eating and almost as natural as drinking.

"Something's got to be allowed for the infirmity of human nature, sir," says the minister, "but such profanity as yours is inexcusable. It is not merely that it violates the precepts of religion. It's against common decency."

"If you don't like it," says Bill, "you can move."

So Cateswell moved.

He done something like the governor did when the county attorney resigned. There was about fourteen candidates planning to get the nomination. The governor didn't want to take sides, and so not to give any of them an advantage over the others he said he'd appoint Judge Wilson, it being understood and agreed that the judge wouldn't be a candidate for the nomination. When the convention come to meet, the judge said he'd found there was such a widespread desire to have him continue in the office that he felt he'd be shirking his duty to the public if he didn't accept the nomination and that the convention would be shirking theirs if they didn't give it to him. So he's county attorney yet, and that's more than fourteen years ago.

Cateswell went on the same principle as the governor. He figured that because the Widow McLeod was most forty, with a son going on nineteen, she wouldn't be a candidate.

"She's just like a mother to me," Cateswell says to me after he'd been rooming at her house a little while, "always cautioning me about going out in wet weather without my over-shoes and worrying if I have a little headache."

I didn't say anything, just smiled. But he caught on.

"You don't think she's got designs on me, too, do you?" says he.

"Well, I ain't blind," says I.

But of course the widow didn't really count, and it wa'n't long before the race narrowed down to Susie Remick and Ida Sargent. Susie was a darkish complected girl, with large, sort of sorrowful eyes. She was pretty strong on book learning, though; could write poetry even. A real deep girl she was, but not much at putting herself forward. The Sargent girl was different. She was one of the light, duffy haired, rosy cheeked, blue eyed kind that can talk you deaf, dumb and blind in ten minutes. Of course in a way she had an advantage, not being bashful, like Susie. But experience counts for a whole lot in a game like that. That's where a girl's mother comes in handy. Mrs. Sargent was an invalid, and, while she could post Ida at home, that wa'n't like being right on the spot and whispering instructions in the girl's ear at just the proper moment. Mrs. Remick was a pretty slick campaigner too. She'd married off three daughters, and she knew how the trick was done if anybody did.

The fellows at the store used to lay wagers on who was going to win. Most of 'em gambled on the Sargent girl, but I'd just shut my left eye and say, "You wait and see." Then they'd get stuffy and say I was always putting on airs and pretending to know more'n other folks and they guessed I hadn't got no second sight and wa'n't no prophet either, all of which I took good natured, not being given to worrying.

Cateswell used to talk the situation over with me quite frank.

"I believe I could be happy with either of 'em," he'd say. "In fact, I'm quite sure of it. But I can't make up my mind which to choose. Miss Remick appeals to the intellectual side of me; but, on the other hand, I like Miss Sargent's vivacity and her unfailing good nature."

I thought to myself, "If you'd heard Ida go jawing around the house like some of the neighbors have you'd change your notion about her unfailing good nature." But I didn't consider it any part of my business to butt in and spoil Ida's game, so I kept my mouth shut about it.

"Flip up a cent," I says. "That's the easiest way to settle it."

"I couldn't think of treating such a matter in a flippant way," says he.

So things ran along that fashion till the day of the Sunday school picnic. 'Twas held over to Hexham lake that year. In them days everybody went to the Sunday school picnic, old codgers and all. You'd go jolting over six miles of not specially good road in one of them rickety old barges of Bill Twichell's, to say nothing of having on shoes that pinched your feet and a collar that half choked you, and you'd go meandering about among the trees and get pine pitch on your best clothes and get all wore out renewing your youth by chucking quoits and playing baseball, and then you'd come jolting back again in the evening, singing "The Spanish Cavalier" and making believe you wa'n't tired 'n you would have been if you'd stayed at home and mowed grass.

There was a feeling around town that Cateswell would propose to one or other of 'em at the picnic. He owned up as much to me the night before.

"I've got to have it over with," says he. "I'm longing for a quiet domestic retreat of my own, and, besides, the thing's getting on my nerves and worrying me so's I can't sleep nights."

Well, right at the outset Mrs. Remick slipped up. She took so much time packing her lunch basket, so's to be sure to get in all the things Cateswell was fond of, not to mention advising Susie, that she and Susie didn't show up at the church till just as the last barge was ready to leave. And Ida Sargent and the minister had gone in the first one. That didn't worry Mrs. Remick much, though, because she knew, of course, Cateswell wouldn't propose in a crowded barge, with folks packed in as close as sardines all round him. But going around the corner by the Narrows the pole of the tall end barge broke off short. They sent down to Smith's sawmill, which ain't far away, and got some help and patched it up, but they lost half an hour doing it, and of all the diletty people you ever saw Mrs. Remick was the worst. But that wa'n't a circumstance to the way she felt when she got to the lake and couldn't see anything of Cates-

well or the Sargent girl. Some of the folks she asked first said they didn't know where the minister was, just to tease her. But in a little while she located him. There he was in a rowboat with Ida Sargent, clear out in the middle of the lake, and Susie's long distance soprano sending "Oh, Promise Me!" across the water. For a minute Mrs. Remick thought 'twas all over. But she don't give up easy. So she just made a trumpet out of her hands and shouted out:

"Lunch's ready!"

"Ain't it rather early?" yells Cateswell after a minute.

"Oh, dear, no!" hollers Mrs. Remick. "And please hurry! We're most famished!"

You'd ought to have seen the look on Ida Sargent's face when she and Cateswell stepped out on the pier. Mrs. Remick grinned. She saw she'd been just in time. Then she took Susie one side and talked to her. I happened to be passing, and I couldn't help hearing part of it.

"You've got to stop being so tremendous bashful, Susie," says her mother. "You get him down to that bench near the swings and talk Browning to him just as soon's lunch is over and leave the rest to me."

Somehow Susie plucked up courage to do it.

They hadn't been sitting there more'n five minutes before Mrs. Remick swooped down on 'em from behind. She put one hand on Cateswell's shoulder and t'other on Susie's.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you," says she. "I have long expected it. Bless you, my children!"

Cateswell was so surprised he couldn't say anything for a minute, and when he did find his tongue and start to tell Mrs. Remick that it was all a mistake she smothered him with talk about how she'd always considered Susie just cut out to be a minister's wife.

"But you know"—says Cateswell, getting desperate.

But she didn't seem to hear him and began saying how Cateswell was the first man she'd ever seen that she thought was good enough for Susie.

Cateswell saw 'twas'n't no use. He thought of how it would look if Susie should sue him for breach of promise and it should get into the newspapers, and the thought of it made him chilly the whole length of his spinal column. So he just gave up.

Well, 'twas p'raps a week before the wedding that Cateswell got confidential, even more'n usual, with me and told me all about how Mrs. Remick had worked it.

"You see," says he, "I'd finally decided I'd marry Miss Sargent, and naturally I—well—er—as you might say, resented Mrs. Remick's conduct. But upon reflection—"

Then he broke off short and ran the palm of his hand thoughtfully over his forehead for a minute or two as though he wa'n't quite clear how to go on. Then he says quite sudden:

"Susie's a fine girl, Mr. Souther."

"Mighty fine girl," says I.

"Of course," says he, sort of meditating. "I don't mean to cast no reflections on Miss Sargent. She's a nice girl too. But the more I think of it the more I feel that, on the whole, I'd ought to be grateful to Mrs. Remick for reaching out and gathering me in, so to speak. You know both girls pretty well, Mr. Souther, and you've had some more experience than I have. What's your opinion?"

"Same as yours," says I.

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